



# University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

## Environmental Center

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### SCR 87

**REQUESTING A STUDY OF THE APPROPRIATE CRITERIA UNDER WHICH UTILITY LINES SHALL BE PLACED UNDERGROUND, AND OF THE APPROPRIATE MEANS OF FINANCING ANY COST DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN OVERHEAD AND UNDERGROUND PLACEMENT OF UTILITY LINES.**

**Senate Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection and Information Technology**

**Public Hearing - April 6, 1998  
9:00A.M., Room 016 State Capitol**

By

John T. Harrison, Environmental Center

SCR 87 requests the Public Utilities Commission, in consultation with State agencies, the counties, the utility companies, and community, environmental and other groups, to examine issues of the relative merits of underground as opposed to overhead utility installations, and report its findings to the Legislature prior to the next session.

My statement on this measure does not constitute an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

As the assumptive clauses of this resolution correctly note, arguments against undergrounding of utility lines rest almost exclusively on grounds of comparative construction costs. Other cost considerations are pointedly excluded from consideration yet potentially alter the balance of decisionmaking significantly. In particular, the economic costs of power and communication loss in the wake of a major hurricane due to widespread damage to overhead utility lines, as well as the repair and maintenance expenses associated with such an event are to all intents and purposes swept under the rug. Occurrence of such a destructive event on Oahu is inevitable, and careful evaluation of the consequences of such a storm is a crucial information need which we can ill afford to further delay.

As SCR 87 notes, a great many areas of concern need to be evaluated. Because of the diversity of information needed and the significance of the consequences of a less than comprehensive study, we suggest that the University of Hawaii, and in particular the Environmental Center be centrally involved in coordinating the many areas of expertise available within the University community which should be brought to bear upon this problem. This is exactly the sort of comprehensive, interdisciplinary study that our office was created to facilitate, and a preliminary proposal to undertake this work already has been prepared which identifies relevant issues, individuals and departments within the University having appropriate expertise and facilities to do the work. We would be pleased to further discuss this proposal with the Committee and with the PUC.